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Rackets Probe Witness Novel Is Back in Ohio

No Action Yet on What He Told Jury

(The Times-Picayune Capital Bureau)

BATON ROUGE, La.—Rackets probe witness Gordon Novel returned Thursday night to Columbus, Ohio, arriving early Friday morning, and if he told the East Baton Rouge Parish Grand Jury anything of value, it has yet to produce any action.

Novel said before leaving here that he felt his nine-hour stint before the jury, while under immunity from arrest in Louisiana, resulted in information that was "relevant." But relevant to what was never made clear.

The much sought after witness—Orleans Parish Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison also wants to talk to him about his presidential assassination probe — managed to elude any summons to talk to the new State Labor Management Commission of Inquiry.

Novel's attorney refused Thursday to allow the commission's investigators to interrogate Novel on labor-management matters. The onetime New Orleans bar-owner, who fled the state and evaded extradition action in the Garrison probe, was granted unusual immunity from any other legal proceedings except the local grand jury inquiry into possible rackets influence on state government.

Local teamster official Edward G. Partin attempted to have the Labor-Management Commission question Novel as to what he might know about matters before that group. When Novel's attorney declined, Camille Gravel, counsel to the commission, said that such questioning might be possible in the future, either in Ohio or here under a new cloak of immunity, if Novel agrees.

The much-publicized Novel tapes obtained, he said, through "bugging" procedures, have not been made public. East Baton Parish Dist. Atty. Sargent Pitcher would not say whether Novel's disclosures before the grand jury would be used in court, but he confirmed he retained the files for his own files.

Novel did not indicate that such information as he gave the jury was obtained in Baton Rouge, but said the events occurred in New Orleans.